

*Viz
Racism*

(the way of peace)

Des Moines
Catholic Worker
House

November, 1976

(Our community has been blessed to have Malcolm MacKenzie as part of the household for the past three months. In December he will leave the house to begin a new life as a married man. The following poem is printed in thanksgiving for his time with us, and with prayers for Malcolm and Drury.)

XXVIII

a man who had fallen among thieves
lay by the roadside on his back
dressed in fifteenthrate ideas
wearing a round jeer for a hat

fate per a somewhat more than less
emancipated evening
had in return for consciousness
endowed him with a changeless grin

whereon a dozen staunch and leal
citizens did graze at pause
then fired by hypercivic zeal
sought newer pastures or because

swaddled with a frozen brook
of pinkest vomit out of eyes
which noticed nobody he looked
as if he did not care to rise

one hand did nothing on the vest
its wideflung friend clenched weakly dirt
while the mute trouserfly confessed
a button solemnly inert.

Brushing from whom the stiffened puke
I put him all into my arms
and staggered banged with terror through
a million billion trillion stars
--e.e. cummings

Round Table Discussions

Part of the Catholic Worker tradition is the "round table discussion" where people join together to verbalize and clarify thoughts. Mass is held almost every Friday at the house (713 Indiana, one block north of University between 7th and 8th) at 8 p.m., followed by a discussion.

December 3

Celebrant-- Fr. Tom Pfeffer
Topic--Frank Cordaro leads a discussion on the Catholic Worker.

December 10

Celebrant--Fr. Jim Lorenzo
Topic--Rev. Mr. Mike O'Meara facilitates a discussion on marriage and divorce in the Catholic Church.

December 17

Celebrant--Fr. John Zittler
Topic--Sr. Eve Cavanaugh of CAPES discusses her ministry with the terminally ill.

December 24 and 31

No liturgies and disussions.

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and Joe Da Via.

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on hospitality Giving Thanks

Home. The hospitality offered at the Des Moines Catholic Worker House has glowed with the colors of a real home. Not the cold institution where the unwilling are sent, but a building where friendship and concern are shared along with food, shelter and clothing.

In the past 2½ months, almost 30 people have shared some time with us, whether it was one night, six weeks, or something in between. All the stays have been, for the most part, friendly; all the departures kind, and the little violence that has been apparent has been limited to words.

The joy, the true love of sharing time with other people, has been abundant. The nights of hot cocoa and cards, laughter, popcorn and liturgies have radiated joy in the three of us, our friends and our guests. Yet even these labels are weak; we are all members of the same physical and spiritual family.

As in all families, though, the tears are too real to ignore. The tears are of a broken family, of confusion, of broken people that fell through holes in the system. Our work is not one of patching the holes in a leaky system, but rather of beginning the revolution. We are beginning with feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless and clothing the

naked at a personal level and continuing as we strive to love our neighbors.

As we shelter, feed and clothe those in need, we daily thank those of you who have helped us with donations of food, other necessities, money and time. Through all of our efforts, we have established a place where Christianity is in practice. Through the hospitality, the opening of our home and yours, by your concern, we have met our Christ of the headline: Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me.

--Joe Da Via



Rita Corbin

November, 1976

Why the Catholic Worker?

Perhaps some clarification as to "why the Catholic Worker" seems to be in order now that we are into our third month. It is important to have in our minds as closely as possible a philosophy behind our actions. This interplay between thought and action, word and deed is the valedation of our efforts--we will be judged by the fruits of our actions.

Aimless action without roots or a ground in what Peter Maurin called a "philosophy of revolution" builds on nothing and is unable to strike any kind of harmony within the persons involved or any kind of integrated response so desperately needed to our society. The clearest of thoughts and systematics not enfolded in the world of action at the very least can be empty and hollow words. These words speak to no one or at the very worst are the very words that serve as an illusion and pacifier to a great many injustices and atrocities perpetrated in our midst.

We can no longer afford not to see clearly and act accordingly. What we do and what we say must be harmonious. We need to speak clearly and act definitively.

"What the world expects of Christians is that Christians



speak out and utter their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never a single doubt can arise in the heart of even the simplest man. That Christians get out of their abstractions and stand face to face with the bloody mess that is our history today. The gathering we need today is the gathering together of men who are resolved to speak clearly with their own person."

-Albert Camus
The Deputy

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So why the Catholic Worker? To my knowledge, The Catholic Worker movement speaks most clearly and acts most definitively in the American Catholic tradition in addressing itself to the full weight of the Gospels and in providing an honest critique of society, for action with a social perspective.

"The society in which we live and which is generally called capitalist (because of its method of producing wealth) and Bourgeois (because of the prevalent mentality) is not in accord with justice and charity."

This statement from the Catholic Worker positions is clear, but in no way is it simple, except perhaps for those who only read and are not brought of response to the statement's truth. The truth of our capitalist bourgeois society is that its guiding principle economically is production for profit and production determines needs. What is good for the individual and the common good is assumed to be taken care of by the hidden hand of our "textbook" capitalism, as we learned it in the 8th grade.

This is not happening today. We live in an economic system that must function on growth in an assumed world of unlimited

resources. That world does not exist today.

We live in an economic system that must have the "haves" and the "Have nots" to function. The split between these two groups is always increasing, especially on the global perspective. (Example: the population of the United States comprises 6% of the total world population, but consumes 40% of its useable resources.) This can not be altered with the existing economic structures. In this sense the structures are both mental and physical.

On the psychological level, "our capitalist society fails to take in the nature of a person but rather regards him as as an economic factor in production." Human beings are judged by their economic worth and they come to believe their worth depends on how much money they make. Everything and every person is seen through the same common denominator--Money. Morally our capitalist bourgeois society thrives on human greed, needs winners and losers and generally affirms the worst in mankind. The Catholic Worker recognizes Caesar in our world today and calls us to task.

To achieve a just society in accordance with the expressed and implied teachings of Christ the Worker advocates a "complete rejection of the present social

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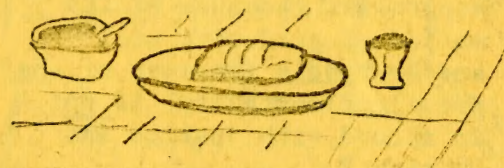
order and a nonviolent revolution." The Worker puts little faith in our political means for no one can take the responsibility that each of us has in taking upon ourselves, to the extent that we are able to direct action to change our society.

It is not true that there is safety in numbers. Anytime the state is too large for the average citizen to call that government to accountability, that state runs itself, and its people are wrong for letting it control them. Anytime a state delegates the responsibility of meeting the needs of the poor, that state is cold and its people are spiritually bankrupt. Anytime a state sets such a high priority in war making (½ of all U.S. tax monies go to military expenditures), that state is evil and those citizens who passively condone this war effort are violently effected within themselves--IGNORANCE IS NO LONGER GRACED.

The Catholic Worker finds no solutions in the state but in a "personalism which takes on ourselves responsibility for changing conditions to the extent that we are able to do so." The Catholic Worker advocates houses of hospitality to meet the needs of the poor in a direct way at a personal price. These houses give those who work at them direct exposure to their own limitations and weaknesses as they are reflected in the guest. The houses of hospitality provide the supportive space needed for

a Catholic Worker to discover himself as he tries to share himself with the "least." More often than not our guest tells us more about ourselves than whatever we can learn about them.

In the context of the hospitality houses, a Worker who is a student has the opportunity to critique society as it really is. Our guests are not poor as though they are so different from the majority of Americans. But really they are like colored photographs of America framed in the light of day, with every detail exposed and accented. Our guests believe all of the prevailing



false American myths to the hilt, from sexism to the communist world threat. They are consumers right down to their last food stamp--a soda pop and potato chip diet. They are addicted to every type of physical stimulant from coffee to hard drugs. Their ability to communicate with each other and their families is very limited and violence is deeply rooted within themselves and within all of their relations.

They are mobile with little sense of rootedness. They have no deep sense of direction. Much of their lives are surface and survival, in the bad sense of these words. The guests have no trust in themselves and in others and they live in a "give

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me" society, a society that gives the hollow material goods with no substance for the soul. They are mass media prone and advertised to death. Their ability to critique amounts to nothing more than ping-pong analyses from one mass media event to the next.

Our guests are us, they are me and at the worker house we can not afford to lose sight of that fact. Our house is their house, our food is their food, and our space is their space. This is the Catholic Worker University, where "idealism is put into practice" and where we hope to directly address the urgent spiritual needs of our country economically, politically, and socially.

The Catholic Worker calls for a decentralized economy with a town and country base. We believe in worker ownership of the means of production and distribution. We need a new understanding of private property. We feel what anyone possesses beyond basic needs does not belong to him, but rather to the poor who are without it. We need to make real what St. Gertrude wrote: "Property, the more common it is, the more holy it is." The Catholic Worker also believes in ultimate freedom of the individual and the person's freedom to choose. The Catholic Worker would never use physical coercion to bring about the changes it saw fit.

Peter Maurin boiled down the Catholic Worker program down to

these three areas: 1) round table discussions; 2) houses of hospitality; and 3) Farming communes. The round table discussions help to give us the clarification of thought that we need to integrate our actions and words. The houses of hospitality are needed to help us en flesh our high ideals and the farming communes are to be the first steps toward reordering our economic system.

Why the Catholic Worker? For me it's the most complete and integrated Catholic tradition. It takes its radicalness from the bible at face value and is still not afraid to look at realities of today's world and still act in faith.

And what of success?

"We believe that success, as the world determines it, is not the criterion by which a movement should be judged. We must be prepared and ready to face seeming failure. The most important thing is that we adhere to these values which transcend time and for which we will be asked a personal accounting, not as to whether they succeeded (though we should hope that they do) but as to whether we remained true to them even though the world go otherwise."

Pray for us in our efforts here, pray for yourself, and then perhaps come join us.

--Frank Cordaro

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AMBASSADORS OF GOD

What we give to the poor for Christ's sake
is what we carry with us when we die.
We are afraid to pauperize the poor
because we are afraid to be poor.
Pagan Greeks use to say that the poor
"are the ambassadors of the gods."
To become poor
is to become an ambassador of God.

St. Francis taught
that to choose to be poor
is just as good as if one should marry
the most beautiful girl in the world.
We seem to think
that poor people are social nuisances
and not ambassadors of God.
We seem to think
that Lady Poverty is an ugly girl
and not the beautiful girl
that St. Francis of Assisi says she is.
And because we think so,
we refuse to feed the poor
with our superfluous goods
and let the politicians feed the poor
by going around like pickpockets,
robbing Peter to pay Paul,
and feeding the poor
by soaking the rich.

--Peter Maurin